5.8 Advent to Christmas: A Time to Prepare & Celebrate

This unit explores the liturgical season of Advent. It focuses on the message of John the Baptist who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. His call is one of challenge and commitment in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Students will examine Advent and Christmas customs and practices that help us prepare for the celebration of Christ’s first coming and the promise of his second coming at the end of time. The unit develops the concept that the promised Saviour, Jesus, is the Son of God, become human; an event that we prepare for and celebrate, and to which we continue to respond in living our faith.

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| **Values & Attitudes***Students will demonstrate that they are:* | **Knowledge & Understandings***Students will demonstrate that they can:* | **Skills***Students will demonstrate that they can:* |
| L3.1 willing to accept their call to respond to God in their lives | identify challenges to respond to the presence of God | examine ways in which the liturgical life of the Church nourishes and challenges them to respond to the presence of God |

Syllabus Outcomes
Liturgical Year – Stage 3

Classroom Outcomes

*Students will be able to:*

* explain the seasons of Advent and Christmas in the Church’s liturgical year
* describe the role of John the Baptist in Scripture
* identify customs and practices of Advent that help them prepare for and celebrate the birth of Jesus and his second coming
* explain the importance of the birth of Jesus

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| --- | --- |
| Scripture | Doctrine |
| John 1:6-8, 15 *John is sent by God*Isaiah 40:3-5 *Prepare a way for God*John 1:19-23 *The witness of John the Baptist*Luke 2:1-20 *The birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds*Luke 3:2-6;10-16 *The preaching of John the Baptist*  | * Jesus is fully human and fully divine
* Jesus is the Son of God
* God promised to send us a Saviour
* The liturgical year of the Church begins with the season of Advent
* At Christmas the Church celebrates the birth of Jesus
 |

 Spiritual Reflection for Teachers

At Advent we are given time to reflect upon, and live out the hope and expectation of Christ’s coming today.

The story of our past and present and our looking to the future, finds embodiment in the coming of Christ at the first Christmas. The Advent season provides the opportunity to reach out to others, and allows us to get caught up in the joy of the coming of Christ. It is a time of reflection about the importance of what family and friends mean to us and how we can respond to the presence of Christ today. We can achieve this by drawing on all of our experiences and resources in an attempt to create a better world for all.

* How do I prepare myself for the season of Advent?
* What hope do I see in the coming of the Christ Child?
* How do I witness to the presence of Christ today? How do I reflect the presence of God to others?
* What experiences of Advent and Christmas can I relate to my students in order to enliven the urge within them to search for a deeper meaning in the Christmas message?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

**Excerpts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church are included below as information for teachers. They present the Church’s teachings contained in this unit.**

1. We believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth, born a Jew of a daughter of Israel at Bethlehem at the time of King Herod the Great and the emperor Caesar Augustus, a carpenter by trade, who died crucified in Jerusalem under the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of the emperor Tiberius, is the eternal Son of God made man. He ‘came from God’, ‘descended from heaven’, and ‘came in the flesh’. For ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father… And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace’.
2. The coming of God’s Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the “First Covenant”. He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming.

**718** John is “Elijah [who] must come”. The fire of the Spirit dwells in him and makes him the forerunner of the coming Lord. In John, the precursor, the Holy Spirit completes the work of “[making] ready a people prepared for the Lord”.

Scripture: Background Information

**John 1:6-8; 15 John is sent by God**

Light is the theme of this passage from the Gospel of John and here we have reference to John the Baptist as a witness to the light. John the Baptist is not the writer of the gospel. Light and John the Baptist are the dominant motifs. John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus - the one who prepares the way, as the book of Isaiah stated (see below), is a familiar and frequently used Advent and Christmas figure. Interestingly the Gospel of John does not mention the fact that John the Baptist is a cousin of Jesus. This is only mentioned in the birth stories of Luke’s gospel and no other New Testament writer makes reference to this fact although John gets good coverage in all four gospels.

**Isaiah 40:3-5 Prepare a way for God**

Isaiah 40 is the beginning of the second section of the Book of Isaiah, which is often referred to as the ‘book of comfort’ (Chapters 40-55). It was written in the 6th century BC towards the end of the Exile. The Persians were in power and the Persian King, Cyrus, had issued a decree that allowed all exiles return to their homelands. The Persians were known for their road building, hence the road building images in these verses. But these roads through the desert are for God and the people of God.

Texts from Isaiah are used during Advent because they are applied to John the Baptist by the writers of the gospels. They present John as the forerunner of Jesus. All three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) use this text from Isaiah in part or as a whole in reference to John the Baptist. It is a highly symbolic text. The 6th century prophet did not have John the Baptist in mind when prophesying. The gospel writers have historicised the prophecy many years after the death of John and Jesus. This means that the Christian community after Jesus’ death used this and other prophetic texts in reference to Jesus. They identified an historical realisation of the ancient prophecy. This text is about preparation and waiting – to return from exile on a new exodus into the promised land. Or waiting with John for the coming of Jesus.

**John 1:19–23 The witness of John the Baptist**

In John’s Gospel, John the Baptist announced the coming of Jesus. John preceded Jesus, in both his birth and his ministry. The preaching of John came to the attention of the Jewish religious leaders who questioned him about what he taught and who he claimed to be. John denied any prophetic leadership. He was only a voice calling out to the people to turn away from sin, and be baptised. He was a messenger, who had been sent ahead of the true Messiah to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. [[1]](#footnote-1)

**Luke 3:2-6, 10-16 The preaching of John the Baptist**

John the Baptist is a typical Advent figure as he too waits for the Messiah. The title ‘messiah’ comes from the Hebrew word *moshiach* and simply means - the anointed one of God. The Greek word for ‘messiah’ is Christ, meaning anointed one of God. The people too were waiting and expecting something to happen as we are told in verse 15 – “A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people”. John knew he was not the Messiah but does not mention who is. So the writer of the Gospel sets a scene of waiting and hoping. John baptises with water but the Messiah who is to come will baptise with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Christ or messiah that people were waiting and hoping for. The involvement of the Holy Spirit is a characteristic theme in Luke’s Gospel.

John’s role in Luke’s Gospel is a preparatory one but of high importance. Luke is the only evangelist to include John’s ethical teaching (vs10-14). The crowds who come to John are to ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’ and he outlines specifically what this means for particular groups. To the question, ‘What then must we do?’ John’s response is radical: no exploitation, no abuse of power and a selfless regard for the disadvantaged.

**‘Luke 2:9–14 The birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds**

Note: *Although the Scripture listed is LK 2:1-20, the key part for this unit is vs 9-14. For a fuller commentary of vs 1-20 see Unit 3.8.*

In a field near Bethlehem a group of shepherds were the first to be told the news of the birth of the Messiah. God’s gift of the Messiah is for all humanity. It carries the message of God’s desire to be in relationship with all people. Status is not important to God. Shepherds were very poor and regarded as living on the fringe of society at this time. But it is to these “little ones” that the good news of the Incarnation (the Word made flesh) is first revealed, good news of peace, justice and freedom.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Church’s Teaching and Lived Tradition

## In Tradition: *To Know Worship and Love*, Year 5, p189

In the first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, you will find the genealogy of Jesus.

Jesus’ ancestors displayed important qualities that we all need for life as a people of faith, love and hope. These qualities can serve as great examples for us today as we prepare once again to celebrate the coming of Jesus among us.

In the Scriptures you can read of the obedience of Abraham, the faithfulness of Ruth, the repentance of David, the courage of John the Baptist, the acceptance of Mary and Joseph and many others.

Celebration: Prayer and Liturgy

**Celebration is a key part of Religious Education. The following suggestions provide opportunities throughout the unit for celebration in prayer and liturgy. Most of these suggestions are included as ‘teaching/learning’ activities in Unit Content sections.**

* A prayer celebration incorporating a rite of gift-giving for families/individuals in need.

Include: The Gloria

 Luke 2:9-14, KWL Year 5, p188

 Prayers of Intercession using as a response “You promised to send us a Saviour” (Doctrine)

* See Resource ‘Follow the Star’. Music Book and Prayers and Resources, M Mangan.
* At morning prayer each day follow the students’ petitions with a response from ‘Our Prayer’ KWL Year 5, p189.
* Plan and prepare a class liturgy using images which could be placed on Nativity Tree with appropriate prayers written by the students (see Unit Content 4).

Assessment

**Interim Assessment Statement 2014**

The identification of Teaching/Learning strategies as ‘suggested assessment’ has been removed from the 3-6 RE curriculum. The type of assessment activity and the way evidence of learning is gathered will vary, depending on such factors as; the outcomes being assessed, the evidence being gathered, the teaching and learning activity, context and students’ learning needs (NSW Board of Studies, <http://syllabus.bos.nsw.edu.au/support-materials/k-6-assessment-strategies/>) .

Assessment in Religious Education is based on the same principles as in other key learning areas. Please refer to the CEO Sydney site supporting the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in the context of the NSW BOS Syllabus. At this site <https://sites.google.com/a/syd.catholic.edu.au/professional-learning-modules/home> professional learning modules are provided to support teachers as they engage with the NSW BOS Syllabuses for the Australian Curriculum.

**Module 4, Assessment and Planning** explores the principles of effective assessment ***for***, ***as*** and ***of*** learning and considers a range of strategies and methods for assessing student learning. Activities focus on moving beyond assessment as an index of learning, towards assessment that motivates, enhances learning and achieves deeper understanding to meet the diverse learning needs of all as students. Participants are encouraged to reflect on assessment as a driver for improvement in teaching and learning.

**Religious Education Curriculum and Assessment**

In Year 3-6 Religious Education Curriculum, both Syllabus Outcomes and Classroom Outcomes are key reference points for decisions about students’ progress and achievement. Classroom outcomes are more specific to the unit content. Unit Content statement and *Students will learn* statements in each unit should also be taken into account in planning and developing learning and assessment opportunities. Outcomes and Unit Content Statements are derived from Syllabus objectives.

Effective Religious Education involves teaching the Catholic faith (Scripture, doctrine, traditions, prayer and sacraments) and nurturing the faith of the child. There is no attempt to assess the child’s faith. Assessment is concerned with skills, knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith taught in the curriculum and supported in the religious life of the school.

Resources

***To Know Worship and Love*, Year 5, Chapter 19 (2003), James Goold House Publications, Melbourne, Victoria**

**Books**

*The Liturgy Documents Vol 1*, Liturgy Training Publications USA

Cooney J and Burton, K, (1986), *Photolanguage Australia, Human Values A & B,* Catholic Education Office, Sydney, NSW

Fox M, (1995), *Wombat Divine*, Omnibus Books

Kearney P, (1986), *Signs of Hope,* Crossover Music, Mittagong NSW

Mangan M, (1985), *Follow the Star,* Music Book, Litmus Publications, Albany Creek Qld

Mangan M, (1995), *Follow the Star*, Prayers and Resources, Litmus Publications, Albany Creek Qld

White D, O’Brien K, Todd S, (2003), *Into the Deep,* KD Publications Marayong

Wild M, (1997), *Light the Lamps,* Scholastic Publications

Woods L, (1992), *The Collins Dove Dictionary for Young Catholics,* Harper Collins, Nth Blackburn, Vic

**Audio Visual**

Video: Marscom S, (1992), *Waiting Time* –Sisters of St Joseph, North Sydney

Video: *Signs of His Presence,* (1988), Leichhardt, Catholic Audio Visual Centre

CD: Schwartz S, (1971), *Godspell*

Key to Symbol

✪ denotes higher order activity

Unit Content 1

**Our Church Year begins with the season of Advent when we prepare for the coming of Jesus the promised Saviour.**

*Students will learn:*

* about the liturgical season of Advent and its place in the liturgical year
* to identify change as necessary in preparation for the coming of Jesus

Unit Content: Background Information

The liturgical year celebrates the paschal mystery of Christ’s life, death and Resurrection. Throughout the liturgical year the Church relives the great events of God’s saving love for all people.

The Church year begins on the first Sunday of Advent (the Sunday closest to 30th November). Advent comes from the Latin, ‘Adventus’, coming toward, meaning that Advent prepares us for the coming of Christ.

*“Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered, and, as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s second coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period of devout and joyful expectation “* (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar par39).

In the reading from Isaiah (40:3-5) the prophet uses the metaphor of preparing a road through the desert. This may be seen as symbolic of the challenges we face or the changes necessary in our lives as we prepare during Advent and respond to God’s promise, fulfilled in Christ.

The Advent and Christmas seasons are to be understood in the context of the mystery of the Incarnation. This is a key mystery of Christianity. God took on human nature and became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Christmas is the feast of this great event.

Advent is a season of joyful and spiritual expectation. It is not a penitential season. The violet vestments and the omission of the Gloria are intended to focus on preparation.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Revisit the seasons of the Church’s year, which celebrate key events in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Recall what these events tell us about God’s love.
* In small groups, students sort and match seasons with events and construct a time-line showing this. Class discussion to ensure correct sequence. See Resource Sheet 1.
* Read about the custom of the Advent Wreath. (KWL Year 5, p193). Create an Advent Wreath to
use as part of class prayer. Review the symbolism. Relate back to the discussion about light from John 3:8.
* Tell the story ‘Our Advent Prayer Place’ as you set the prayer place for the season of Advent. See Resource Sheet 2 for suggested script.
* Explore the place of Advent in the Church’s calendar.Using Resource Sheet 3,complete steps of the spiral identifying a symbol for each liturgical season, the events from Jesus’ life being celebrated and what the season means for us today.
* Read: ‘We Celebrate Advent' - first three paragraphs (KWL Year 5, p185). Engage students in exploring this text using wondering statements. The following are suggested:
* I wonder where you’ve seen Jesus’ love in the world.
* I wonder where you see Jesus’ love in your life.
* I wonder what you can do to show Jesus’ love to others.
* Read a picture book that focuses on anticipation/preparation, eg Wombat Divine by Mem Fox. Discuss with students the themes of waiting, preparing and longing.
* Share (in pairs) an experience of waiting and preparing for special events or important challenges. When we prepare, what emotions do we feel, what words do we use, what actions do we take? How do we share our excitement/our fears? Who do we tell? What do we do? What images do we have? Record some of the thoughts, images, words and ideas on a wall chart.
* Explore how these experiences help us to understand the season of Advent. Focus attention on Advent as a time when our waiting and longing are directed towards the coming of Jesus.
* Begin a word bank connected with the liturgical season – Advent, saviour, season…
* Discuss with students how they can open their hearts to the presence of Jesus today in the way they live and act. Students choose something personally meaningful and record their Advent promise. These could be placed on the sacred space during a prayer celebration.
* Prepare a class Advent calendar – with students’ ideas of how they can prepare for Christmas, eg ‘Include others in my games’, ‘Say a prayer for a person in need’, ‘Think of others – keep your space tidy’.

Unit Content 2

In the readings of Advent, John the Baptist reminds us to prepare for the coming of Jesus the Saviour.

*Students will learn:*

* about the challenge of John the Baptist’s message
* to identify the voices of joy and hope in our lives and the lives of others

Unit Content: Background Information

A key figure in the Advent liturgy is John the Baptist, a prophet, who cried out for the people to be ready and prepared because of the imminent appearance of the Messiah. His call is one of challenge and commitment in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. John’s preaching prepared the way for Jesus’ mission.

The challenge of Advent is to move beyond passive waiting. We are invited to fill Advent with the energy of living out our commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ. It is a time of active waiting that helps us to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. We are called to be prophetic, discerning of and responsive to God’s will in our lives. We work with joy and hope for our own conversion and the conversion of the world, when the reign of God will be fulfilled.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Tell the story ‘John the Baptist - Prepare the Way’ (Isaiah 40:3-5; John 1:6-8, 15, 19-23; Luke 3:2-6, 10-16) using suggested script and materials - Resource Sheet 4
* Engage students in wondering. Suggested wondering statements are
* I wonder how John knew he was sent by God?
* I wonder what it is like to be spoken to by God?
* I wonder what it would be like to be called to bring a message from God to others?
* I wonder if there are still prophets today? I wonder what their message is?
* I wonder how you would prepare the way for the Lord today?
* Read ‘Preparing in faith…’ in KWL, Year 5, p185. Discuss: what does it mean for us to be ‘strong voices of hope and joy in Jesus’?
* In groups, students create a collage of magazine or newspaper pictures, articles, headlines etc, which point to God’s presence in the world. Relate back to the Advent message of joy and hope.
* Write a class ‘Advent’ statement about how we as Christians, like John, can be voices of joy and hope
* Read Isaiah 40:3-5. Explore the meaning of the metaphor using wondering. Some suggested statements are:
* I wonder why every valley needs to be lifted up and every hill made low, the uneven ground become level and the rough places, a plain.
* I wonder what ‘a highway for God’ might mean.
* In the metaphor used, ‘make a straight highway’, what is Isaiah telling us about preparing for the coming of God? What changes do we need to make in our lives to make a ‘smooth path’ for the coming of the Lord? (See ‘Background Information’ for Unit Content 1.) Sing the hymn *Fill Every Valley* – M Mangan.
* Design a plan for making a ‘straight highway for God’. What would be the challenges? What would be some of the actions needed? How would you get others involved? Relate to contemporary issues.
* Listen to ‘John and Jesus’ from *Signs of Hope* by Peter Kearney. Record what change/s may be necessary in our lives if we are to allow Jesus, ‘the promised one’, to really affect our lives?
* Read Luke 3:2-6,10-16. (See *Follow the Star,* Resource Book, M Mangan, p12 – ‘Shared Narrative’). Using a matrix, students identify: the main character; other groups who are present - tax-collectors, soldiers; what happens? Where does the action take place?
* Introduce doctrine: God promised to send us a Saviour. Explore the term “Saviour” and its implications for us. Identify and discuss the responses John gives to those who ask ‘What must they do to repent’ (3:10-16)?
* What might the people who heard these words have thought?
* Identify with one of the people who heard John the Baptist. Using a Y chart – What did you see? hear? do?
* Using a ‘Hotseat’ activity, students choose one of the following characters from the above Scripture passage – John, tax collector, soldier, or onlooker. Prepare three open-ended questions to ask that person, eg what brought you to the Jordan district?
* Journal a response to John’s message: “As I stood by the river Jordan I heard John the Baptist say …”
* Read John 1:6-8,15,19-23 (KWL Year 5, p188). Explore the words (verse 8) ‘He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light’. Discuss with a partner. Develop a definition of the terms ‘prophet’ and ‘witness’.
* Work with a partner to create a wanted poster or advertisement for a prophet? Discuss the difficulties or challenges of being a prophet or witness to faith.
* Discuss: Who are the prophetic figures in our world today? What issues do they speak about and challenge people to do something about? Who are the voices of joy and hope in our world?
* Students role play scenarios of times when they can give witness to Jesus or they can be prophetic voices.
* Teacher leads the students in a meditation:

“If God asked you to be a messenger (like John), what would you tell the people about Jesus? How would you act to identify yourself as a follower of Jesus? What issues or challenges would you stand for that relate to continuing on Jesus’ mission in the world? What message of joy or hope would you deliver?”

* Recall ways John the Baptist reminds us to prepare for the coming of Jesus. How is this a challenge in my life? In what ways could I respond to this challenge?

Unit Content 3

The Church in Australia celebrates Advent and Christmas with customs from many countries. Some customs include helping others who, like the Holy Family, are homeless or refugees.

*Students will learn:*

* about the Advent wreath and other ways they can prepare for the coming of Jesus
* to identify and participate in customs and practices which turn our hearts towards the needs of others

Unit Content: Background Information

As members of the Church we are challenged by the readings of the Advent season to be committed to love God and our neighbour. Through our baptismal call we are called to proclaim the Kingdom of God in word and action. During Advent we can accept the challenge of contributing our energies and resources towards the needs of the wider community through organisations like St Vincent de Paul.

**Origin of the Advent Wreath**

The Advent Wreath has its origins in Scandinavia. Christmas was celebrated in conjunction with the feast of the winter solstice. Candles were placed on a horizontal wheel and spun to give the effect of one continuous light. This symbolised the return of light to the world. This was adapted into a distinctly religious symbol of the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World.

The Advent Wreath is a circle of evergreen leaves with four candles, three purple and one pink (or white candles decorated in these colours). The pink candle, which is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, highlights the joy of expectancy on a Sunday when vestments of rose colour rather than purple may be worn. A fifth candle may also be placed in the centre of the wreath. This is a white candle, the Christ candle, lit on Christmas Eve.

Symbolism of the Advent Wreath:

* Circle: God’s never ending love
* Evergreens: endless life
* Candles: Christ’s ever increasing light as Christmas approaches.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Examine ways people from different cultures celebrate Christmas and respond to the Christmas message. Discuss how these help us prepare and identify those customs which show a reaching out towards the needs of others.
* Watch video ‘Waiting Time’ - Section on ‘Light’ – Advent Wreath. Focus on concept of Jesus being the Light of the World.
* Read ‘A Different Christmas’ (KWL Year 5, p190-192). Discuss the challenges and the possible moments of conversion (change of heart) for the two children in the story? What message is in the story for us? Which customs in our society are reflected in this story?
* ✪ - Debate the statement, ‘Christmas without presents just isn’t Christmas at all’.
* Brainstorm and list those Advent/Christmas customs that have a focus on the care of others. Why are these customs important to out Advent preparation? How do these customs help us to prepare with faith and hope? Read ‘Sharing in Love’ (KWL Year 5, p186).
* Examine ways in which we might respond to the needs of various people and groups within the community this Christmas.
* Invite a member of the local St Vincent de Paul Society to talk about the challenges many people and families are faced with, especially around Christmas time.
* Students discuss as a class one challenge they can carry out together to show their care and concern for others. eg (a) Contribute items for hampers for distribution by St Vincent de Paul; (b) Prepare to entertain residents at a local nursing home. Make cards, prepare songs for short concert; bring along items to share for morning tea.
* Read about the parish community gathering for Mass at Christmas (KWL Year 5, p187). Invite sharing of students’ own experiences.
* Make a Christmas card for a friend or family member using phrases from scripture or messages based on doctrine eg ‘Come, Lord Jesus’, ‘Glory to God in the Highest’, ‘Bring peace to others’, ‘Share the Good News of Jesus today’.
* Reflect on the words of a Christmas carol about Jesus’ birth, eg ‘Joy to the World’.
* Participate in a class prayer celebration. Include a ritual of gift-giving, eg for St Vincent de Paul hamper. Use the Gloria, Scripture - Luke 2:9-14 (KWL Year 5, p188) and an Advent hymn.
* List and explain the Advent and Christmas customs that teach us about preparing in faith and hope for the birth of Jesus.

Unit Content 4

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus, when God came to earth and became one of us.

*Students will learn:*

* about Christmas as the celebration of the birth of Jesus
* to recognise that Jesus the Son of God, is truly God and truly man

Unit Content: Background Information

Christmas is the great feast of the Incarnation, one of the key mysteries of Christianity. Within our liturgical celebration we reflect upon and celebrate the reality of the Incarnation, the union of the divine and human in the person of Jesus who lived among us. Christians realise that the Christ event in history, when God became human, signals that the reign of God is at hand. The Kingdom of God is among us. Evidence of this reality will be found where love, joy, peace and justice flourish.

Through our celebration of the birth of Jesus we remember and reflect on the presence of God with us in our world today. We seek renewal as people of faith, challenged to keep responding to the presence of God in our lives. The person who lives an incarnational faith, needs to be inflamed by a passionate and intense love of the world. We see in the world the handiwork of God, and in the people of the world, the face of Christ.

**The Nativity Tree**

The Nativity Tree is a custom that uses images or symbols of the Nativity to help explore the Christmas story of Jesus’ birth. Each image / symbol depicts a key figure or object connected to the nativity event. Through these images/symbols students are able to reflect on the religious significance of the birth of Jesus, God-made-man.

Suggested Teaching/Learning Strategies

* Tell the Story of Luke 2:1-20 (Resource Sheet 5)
* Engage students in wondering. Suggested wondering statements are

I wonder what the place was like where Mary had her baby.

I wonder what the words, “the glory of the Lord shone around them” mean/ or what that might look like.

I wonder how the shepherds found Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

I wonder what it means that Mary “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart”.

I wonder what you ponder in your heart.

* Give students a choice of how they would like to respond to the story e.g. artwork, retelling the story with materials, drama related to the story, journaling.
* Reread Luke 2:9-14 (KWL Year 5, p188). Script a dialogue between the shepherds as they went to visit Jesus
* Students write a recount in which they:

- name the main character

- list and sequence the key events

- identify where the events took place

* + describe how the birth of Jesus brings hope to our world today.

*(Into the Deep* Scripture Probe proforma p62-63 maybe useful.)

* Take the following Nativity images: Mary, Joseph, Christ, manger, angel, peace, shepherds, wise men, gifts, star. Research the origin of these images using a Catholic dictionary. Students prepare a glossary of terms to explain their meaning and significance. Brainstorm other images/symbols that may be appropriate. Refer to Resource Sheet 6.
* Plan and prepare a class liturgy using images which could be placed on Nativity Tree with appropriate prayers written by the students.
* Read ‘We Celebrate Christmas’ – 3 dot points – in KWL Year 5, p186-187.
* Use the Angelus as a reference point to explore an understanding of the “Did you know?” section, KWL, Year 5, p194 – points 2, 3, 4 & 5. (Doctrine: Jesus is fully human and fully divine.) Students perform, mime or use liquid pictures to depict the first part of the Angelus (‘*Our Prayers*’, KWL Year 5, p199). Record second half of prayer in RE books.
* Introduce doctrine: Jesus is the Son of God. In small groups students discuss why the birth of Jesus is important for us as Catholics. Each group to record and report back three main ideas.
* Read ‘Light the Lamps’ (M Wild). Discuss how the birth of Jesus brought hope to the characters in this story. Discuss how the birth of Jesus continues to bring hope to us today.
* View ‘Signs of his Presence’ video. Discuss signs of God’s presence in our world today. In what way is Jesus the greatest sign of God’s love? How can we be signs of God’s love? Record using word and images.
* Students write an explanation in response to the question: ‘Why is the birth of Jesus important for us as Catholics?’ They could also write a personal reflection: ‘Why is the birth of Jesus important to me today?’

 **Resource Sheet 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ADVENT** | **CHRISTMAS** | **ORDINARY TIME** | **LENT** | **EASTER** |
| A time of preparation for the birth of Jesus | A time when we celebrate the birth of Our Saviour Jesus Christ | A time when we hear about Jesus’ ministry and we are challenged by Jesus’ call to discipleship | A penitential time when we practise the Gospel message of loving God and others | A time when we celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection and New Life |
| We wait for the coming of the Light of Christ into our lives | Reflects a season of joy and giving modelled on God’s great gift of Jesus | Reflects the beauty and goodness of our everyday lives | A time of growth and renewal | We share in the joy of the promise of everlasting life |
| Isaiah 40:3 | Luke 2: 10-11 | Matt 22:34-39 | John 13:12-15 | Luke 24:35 |
| http://www.isholf.is/gardarj/images/manger.gifhttp://images.google.com.au/images?q=tbn:TaGo9KdJrYsC:www.promisekeepers.org/meet/cross.jpghttp://images.google.com.au/images?q=tbn:OdLHu2XlNcsC:www.centralmainewreath.com/advent.jpg |  | http://images.google.com.au/images?q=tbn:TmFNLp6b__oC:www.warmblankets.org/kids_curiculum/jesus_teaching.jpg |  | http://images.google.com.au/images?q=tbn:eKdPY0JpTgoC:www.northernbc.com/cariboowoodshop/gifs/scene-cross.gif |

**Resource Sheet 2**

**5.8 Our Advent Prayer Place**

**YOU WILL NEED:**

* a small table
* a box or basket, containing a ***purple*** cloth, Bible, bookstand, Advent wreath and John the Baptist, next to your chair

*Invite children to sit reverently in a circle in the part of the classroom where you intend to set up a prayer place. Begin by saying…*

**As Advent begins we’re going to change our prayer place. This is a place where we can be quiet with God. We can listen to God and pray.**

**During the season of Advent we’ll have some different objects and symbols to help us to pray.**

*Cover the table with the* ***purple*** *cloth.*

**At this time of the Church’s year we place a *purple* cloth on the table.**

**Purple is the colour for getting ready. Advent is a time for getting ready. Advent marks the beginning of the Church year.**

**During Advent we are getting ready for Christmas.**

*Hold the Bible up for all children to see. Be conscious of handling the Bible in a reverent manner.*

**The Bible is our special book. At this time in the Church’s year we tell the stories of people who were getting ready for the birth Jesus.**

*Demonstrate how to carry, lift and hold the Bible in a reverent manner.*

*Place the Bible on a stand on the table.*

*Take out the Advent wreath and show to children.*

**The custom of using an Advent wreath will help to focus our thoughts and prayers during this time of preparation.**

*Place the Advent wreath in the space.*

*Take out John the Baptist and show to children.*

**Advent is a time of preparation. John the Baptist was a prophet sent by God to prepare the people for the coming of the Saviour.**

*Place John the Baptist in the space.*

**Other symbols may be added appropriate to the season and unit.**

**This is our prayer place for Advent.**

*Point to the symbols and objects as you name them again.*

**It has a *purple* cloth, a Bible, an Advent wreath and John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for the Lord.**

 **Resource Sheet 3**

**Concept Spiral**

*Inner Wedge:*

* Draw a symbol for the season

*Inner Circle:*

* Select a key event from one Gospel that reflects the core message/purpose of the season.

*Outer Circle:*

* Write what this season means for us today.

(Adapted from KWL Teaching Companion 3a, p88)

**Resource Sheet 4**

**John the Baptist – Prepare the Way**

Based on: Isaiah 40:3-5; Luke 3:2-6, 10-16; John 1:6-8, 15, 19-23

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **YOU WILL NEED*** Beige felt underlay
* Mountain felt images (template)
* Brown felt strip to represent road
* Blue felt strip to represent river
* Labelled prophet cards Elijah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Micah, Ezekiel (see cards below to laminate)
 | * Small scroll (with Is 40:3-5 written in it)
* Isaiah figure
* John the Baptist figure
* Crowd figure
* Tax collector figure
* Soldier figure
* Priest and Levite
 |

*Prepare story telling space. Unroll beige underlay. Place mountains and straight road onto the underlay.*

**Throughout the long history of the Bible right up to today there have been prophets: people who listen to God and speak for God. In the Bible we can read the words of many of the prophets.**

*Place the Elijah card near to the mountains.*

**Prophets have always reminded the People of God to be faithful to their covenant with God. People didn’t always like their messages. Sometimes the prophets brought messages of warning,**

*Place other prophet cards near to the mountains (Joel, Amos)*

**sometimes they called the people to repent of their sins and change their ways,**

*Place more prophet cards (Hosea, Jeremiah)*

**other times they brought messages of great hope and comfort.**

*Place more prophet cards near to mountains (Micah, Ezekiel)*

**Prophets are sent by God.** *Point to each of the prophets*

**Some of the prophets helped prepare the way for God’s son, Jesus who came as the light for the whole world.**

*Place figure of Isaiah near to the road*

**Long ago, a prophet named Isaiah brought this message of hope to the People of God. He said:**

*Unroll scroll and read*

**A voice cries out:**

**‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,**

**make straight in the desert a highway for our God**

**Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;**

**the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.**

**Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ (**Isaiah 40:3-5)

*Place scroll next to Isaiah*

**Isaiah was telling the people to get ready because someone was coming, someone chosen by God.**

*Place figure of John near road.*

**Many years later a prophet named John was born.**

**John was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. He was a man sent from God and he came to be a witness to the light so that all would come to believe.**

*Place river onto the underlay and place figure of John next to it.*

**John went into the area around the River Jordan, calling people to repent of their sins and to be baptised.**

*Place crowd figure near to John*

**The crowds asked him, ‘What should we do? John replied, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’**

*Add tax collector figure to scene*

**Tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ John said to them, ‘Collect no more than is owed to you.’**

*Add soldier figure to scene*

**Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do? He said to them, ‘Do not threaten people for money, and be satisfied with your wages.’**

**The people began to wonder whether John might be the promised Messiah.**

**John said to them, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’**

*Place figures of a priest and Levite*

**Some priests and Levites from Jerusalem came to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ ‘Are you Elijah or one of the prophets?’**

*Point to prophet cards*

**John answered, ‘No, I am not.’ They asked, ‘Are you the Messiah’? ‘No’, he replied.**

*Place figures of priest and Levite a little distance from John*

**Then they said to him, ‘Who are you?**

*Move John near to road*

**So John replied, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord.’**

*Trace hand along the length of the road.*

*Pause for a while before wondering with the students.*

* I wonder how John knew he was sent by God.
* I wonder what it is like to be spoken to by God.
* I wonder what it would be like to be called to bring a message from God to others.
* I wonder if there are still prophets today. I wonder what their message is.
* I wonder how you would prepare the way for the Lord.



**Mountains**

**PROPHET CARDS FOR USE IN JOHN THE BAPTIST STORY**

**(laminate for use)**

Elijah

Amos

Joel

 Ezekiel

Jeremiah

Micah

Hosea

**Resource Sheet 5**

**The birth of jesus**

 **(based on Luke 2:1-20)**

**You will need**

* Bible
* beige felt underlay
* brown felt road
* Nativity set: Joseph, Mary, donkey, baby Jesus, manger, stable, 2 shepherds, 3 sheep, 3 angels

*Children are seated in a semi-circle ready to listen to the story. When the children are ready carry the materials carefully from the story shelf to the story area, place them beside you and say*

*Place class Bible, open at Luke, in front of you with your hand on it.*

**This story comes from the Gospel according to Luke, which is in the New Testament section of the Bible.**

*Place Bible beside you.*

*Place the underlay in the middle of the space.*

*Place the road on top of the underlay.*

*Place Mary, Joseph and donkey on the road at the far end away from you.*

**In those days the Emperor Augustus decreed that all people should be registered in the town of their birth. Since Joseph was born in Bethlehem he had to go there.**

*Slowly move Mary, Joseph and donkey halfway down the road.*

**So Joseph travelled with Mary from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem to be registered.**

*Place your hand at the opposite end of the road to Mary and Joseph.*

**Bethlehem was a long way from their home in Nazareth and their child was expected to be born soon.**

*Continue to slowly move Mary, Joseph and donkey down the road to Bethlehem.*

**When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, the town was very crowded.**

*Place stable to the side of the road. Move Mary, Joseph and donkey from the road to the stable.*

*Hold Jesus in your hand as you say*

**While they were there the time came for Mary to have her child. She gave birth to her firstborn son.**

*Place Jesus in the manger between Mary and Joseph.*

**Mary wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.**

*Place shepherds and sheep on the underlay away from the road and the stable.*

**Now nearby there were some shepherds living in the fields watching over their sheep by night.**

*Place an angel near shepherds.*

**An angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The shepherds were terrified!**

*Move the angel a little closer to the shepherds.*

**The angel said, “Do not be afraid… I am bringing you news of great joy for all people. To you, this day, in Bethlehem, is born the Messiah, the Lord!**

**This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”**

*Place more angels facing shepherds.*

**Suddenly a multitude of angels appeared, praising God saying,**

**“Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace.”**

*Move angels to your side. Move shepherds to the stable.*

**After this the angels left and the shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem. They found Mary and Joseph, and the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in the manger just as the angels had promised.**

*Turn Mary and Joseph to face the shepherds.*

**The shepherds explained what the angels had told them about this child. Everyone was amazed.**

*Turn Mary to face the child Jesus.*

**Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.**

*Move the shepherds back to their fields.*

**The shepherds returned to their fields praising God for all they had heard and seen.**

*Pause for a while before wondering with the students.*

I wonder what the place was like where Mary had her baby.

I wonder what the words, “the glory of the Lord shone around them” mean/ or what that might look like.

I wonder how the shepherds found Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

I wonder what it means that Mary “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart”.

I wonder what you ponder in your heart.

 **Resource Sheet 6**

**IMAGES / SYMBOLS FOR THE NATIVITY TREE**

**MARY** The mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Mary was chosen by God to be the mother of the Saviour and was preserved from all sin from the moment of her conception. In Catholic tradition, Mary was a virgin before and after the birth of Jesus. Mary and her husband Joseph raised Jesus in Nazareth.

**JOSEPH** The husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus. Mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel as a good and righteous man.

**CHRIST** From the Greek *Christos* meaning ‘anointed one’. In Hebrew it means Messiah. The title ‘messiah’ was given to all the kings of Israel because they were anointed on their foreheads with oil at their coronation.

**MANGER** Box or food trough containing cattle feed or straw. After his birth, Jesus was laid in a manger according to Luke’s Gospel. This led to the belief that Jesus was born in a stable.

**ANGEL** Angels are messengers from God. For example, the angel Gabriel sent to give Mary the message she was to be the mother of Jesus.

**PEACE** The Israelites greeted each other with the wish for peace and wholeness (shalom).

**(DOVE)** To wish people peace means to wish them prosperity, wholeness and harmony in their lives. Conversion to Christianity, in the New Testament, put a person at peace with God**.** We greet each other with the sign of peace in the celebration of the Eucharist.

**SHEPHERD** A person who looks after sheep. The prophets criticised the bad rulers of Israel as being like bad shepherds who did not look after their sheep. Jesus is referred to as the good shepherd who loves and watches over his sheep.

**WISE MEN** Priests of the Zoroastrian religion in ancient Persia who practised magic and studied the stars. The wise men or Magi mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel came from the east and brought Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

**GIFTS** Christians used the Greek word *charisma* to refer to a gift that is freely given and does not depend on what people deserve. This kind of gift giving does not expect anything in return. All Christians have gifts from the Holy Spirit, and these enable them to reach out to others and contribute to building the reign of God.

**STAR** Used as a symbol to link heaven and earth.

 [cf *The Collins Dove Dictionary for Young Catholics*]

1. KWL, Teaching Companion, 4a, p169 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. KWL Teaching Companion, 4A, p169 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)